

# Information on Chlamydia



## **What is chlamydia?**

Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the bacterium, *Chlamydia trachomatis*, which can damage a woman's reproductive organs. Even though symptoms of chlamydia are usually mild or absent, serious complications that cause irreversible damage, including infertility, can occur "silently" before a woman ever recognizes a problem. Chlamydia also can cause discharge from the penis of an infected man.

## **How common is chlamydia?**

Chlamydia is the most frequently reported bacterial sexually transmitted disease in the United States. An estimated 2.8 million Americans are infected with chlamydia each year.

## **How do people get chlamydia?**

Chlamydia can be transmitted during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Chlamydia can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during vaginal childbirth. Any sexually active person can be infected with chlamydia. The greater the number of sex partners, the greater the risk of infection.

## **What are the symptoms of chlamydia?**

Chlamydia is known as a "silent" disease because about three quarters of infected women and about half of infected men have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they usually appear within 1 to 3 weeks after exposure. Women who have symptoms might have an abnormal vaginal discharge or a burning sensation when urinating. Men with signs or symptoms might have a discharge from their penis or a burning sensation when urinating. Men might also have burning and itching around the opening of the penis. Pain and swelling in the testicles are uncommon. Men or women who have receptive anal intercourse may acquire chlamydial infection in the rectum, which can cause rectal pain, discharge, or bleeding. Chlamydia can also be found in the throats of women and men having oral sex with an infected partner.

## **What complications can arise from untreated chlamydia?**

If untreated, chlamydial infections can progress to serious reproductive and other health problems with both short-term and long-term consequences. Like the disease itself, the damage that chlamydia causes is often "silent." Complications among men are rare. Infection sometimes spreads to the epididymis (a tube that carries sperm from the testis), causing pain, fever, and, rarely, sterility. Rarely, genital chlamydial infection can cause arthritis that can be accompanied by skin lesions and inflammation of the eye and urethra (Reiter's syndrome).

## **How does chlamydia affect a pregnant woman and her baby?**

In pregnant women, there is some evidence that untreated chlamydial infections can lead to premature delivery. Babies who are born to infected mothers can get chlamydial infections in their eyes and respiratory tracts. Chlamydia is a leading cause of early infant pneumonia and conjunctivitis (pink eye) in newborns.

## **How is chlamydia diagnosed?**

There are laboratory tests to diagnose chlamydia. Some can be performed on urine; other tests require that a specimen be collected from a site such as the penis or cervix.

## **What is the treatment for chlamydia?**

Chlamydia can be easily treated and cured with antibiotics. All sex partners should be evaluated, tested, and treated. Persons with chlamydia should abstain from sexual intercourse until they and their sex partners have completed treatment, otherwise re-infection is possible.

### **How can chlamydia be prevented?**

The surest way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases is to abstain from sexual contact, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Latex male condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of chlamydia.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Central District Health Department – Office of Epidemiology, Surveillance, and Community Assessment  
707 N. Armstrong Pl.  
Boise, ID 83704  
208-327-8625

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[Sexually Transmitted Diseases](#) - Home Page  
[Chlamydia](#) - Topic Page  
[STDs and Pregnancy](#) - Fact Sheet  
[Order Publications Online](#)

### **[CDC National Prevention Information Network](#) (NPIN)**

P.O. Box 6003  
Rockville, MD 20849-6003  
1-800-458-5231  
1-888-282-7681 Fax  
1-800-243-7012 TTY  
E-mail: [info@cdcnpin.org](mailto:info@cdcnpin.org)

### **[American Social Health Association](#) (ASHA)**

P. O. Box 13827  
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-3827

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*If you have additional questions, please call your doctor or local health department.*

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### **Central District Health Department**

[www.cdhd.idaho.gov](http://www.cdhd.idaho.gov)

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707 N. Armstrong Place  
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208-327-8625

**Valley County Office**  
703 N. First Street  
McCall, ID 83638  
208-634-7194

**Elmore County Office**  
520 E. 8th Street N.  
Mountain Home, ID 83647  
208-587-4407